Challenging the Status Quo

Matemba, Yonah H.; Lilemba, John Makala

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Challenging the Status Quo: Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge through Namibia's Postcolonial Education System

Although Namibia has been independent for more than two decades (1990-2014), the school curriculum remains essentially Eurocentric despite rhetoric on educational reform. Similar to other African countries, Western ideological power continues to dominate postcolonial education, even though political power rests in the hands of African leaders. Employing George Sefa Dei's anti-colonial discursive framework, this article presents a critical analysis of postcolonial education in Namibia and of its failure to adopt a diverse and culturally sensitive school curriculum. This article concludes that, in future reforms, the Namibian education system must incorporate indigenous knowledge not only to preserve this knowledge but also to recognise the multilogicality of knowledge production and its uses in diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: Indigenous education; postcolonial state; traditional culture; anti-colonial framework; Namibia

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge in educational contexts has received greater attention in general discourse, not only in Africa (Dei 2012; Mule 1999; Wame 2013) but also internationally in countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia and South America (Barnhardt 2005; Despagne 2013; Ninnes 2000) where indigenous peoples continue to assert their rights. Indigenous peoples are connected to places and cultures in the politics of knowledge production. Conceptualisations of indigeneity are contested because there is no single definition of the term, but instead there are numerous categories of indigeneity. This variety has resulted in the development of the term indigenous knowledges. The absence of a universal definition of indigenous knowledge is not problematic *per se* because "many indigenous people do not imagine their worlds as singular or undifferentiated" (Dei 2011, 25).

The discourse on indigenous knowledge is also related to decolonisation, which aims to safeguard *subjugated knowledge* that has been historically "marginalised in relation to Western epistemological and curricular power" (Semali and Kincheloe 1999, 31). Thus, postcolonial narratives view decolonisation as a necessary process for indigenous peoples to undergo to reclaim their identity and resist Western influences and temptations (Simpson 2004). Postcolonial scholars challenge the Eurocentric fallacy of Africa as a *tabula rasa* before colonisation, and thus refute the Western mindset, which views African indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production as unscientific and incompatible with contemporary schooling (Dei 2011). Postcolonial scholarship is keen to emphasise that African indigenous knowledge systems have somehow survived outside formal education despite the hegemony of Western epistemological power in education because such knowledge is "contextually and historically grounded amongst local peoples…for their own livelihood and advancement" (Kaya and Seleti 2013, 35).

Yet, despite the absence of colonialism (in the historical sense) in much of postcolonial Africa, Western influences on education remain strong. One such influence is connected to the lingering dominance of the English language in Africa's postcolonial education. In Kenya, for example, government efforts to replace English with Kiswahili (spoken by most Kenyans but not as their mother tongue) as the *lingua franca* in education have been fiercely resisted by the political elite, apparently because the adoption of Kiswahili will undermine unity among various ethnic groups and because Kiswahili will not afford children a

competitive advantage in an internationally scientific and technological world (Mule 1999). The ways in which indigenous knowledge are promoted and resisted in educational contexts are "intrinsically crossed by factors of power" (Maurial 1999, 67) between indigenous groups who are eager to promote their knowledge and the knowledge of those who hold the "power to determine what knowledge is of most worth and should be included in academic curricula" (Kincheloe and Steinberg 2008, 144). In this context, indigenous knowledge (as "subjugated" knowledge) is marginalised in relation to Western epistemological power. The issue rests in the fact that "knowledge production processes traditionally and in contemporary time have been by Western philosophical thought and worldviews that undermine or devalue indigenous philosophical thoughts that are equally relevant" (Elabor-Idemudia 2011, 142).

Based on the findings of a Namibian study, this article contributes to an on-going critique of the discourse on the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge by Western ideological and curricular power (see Dei 2011; Wame 2013). In Namibia, as in much of Africa, processes of Western dominance over indigenous culture have a long history that extends back to the arrival of Christian missionaries, settlers and later colonial rulers (British and German; apartheid South Africa) in the mid-1800s (Fosse 1997). As this article focuses on the insights of Mafwe participants, only features of the Zambezi Region (known as Caprivi until 2013), where the Mafwe people have lived since the sixteenth century, will be discussed (Kangumu 2011). The Zambezi Region covers a small strip of land (14,785 km^2) positioned along the extreme northeastern region of Namibia and nearly surrounded by foreign countries, namely Angola, Zambia, Botswana and, to an extent, Zimbabwe (Zeller 2010).

During the colonial period, the region was settled first by missionaries and settlers in the 1850s, and then, between the 1890s and 1918, it fell under German colonial control. From 1921 to 1929, the country was under direct British imperial administration, and later, between 1930 and 1939, it was governed by the British as part of the South West African Protectorate (Kangumu 2011). From 1940 until Namibia's independence in 1990 (after a bitter, 30-year-long struggle led by the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), which was later joined in 1964 by the Caprivi African National Union (CAU)), the Zambezi Region was governed by South Africa, and, when that country adopted the apartheid state ideology in 1948, the region was designated a *Bantustan* (a racially segregated territory for African populations) (Zeller 2010). Following independence, the Zambezi Region became one of the country's 14 (as reorganised in 2013) political regions (Massó Guijarro 2013).

Given its geographical isolation within Namibia, the Zambezi Region developed fairly independently from the rest of Namibia, and thus over time, the region has developed a distinct political identity (Fosse 1997). This may explain why the region has historically exhibited few organic linkages with the rest of the country, a situation compounded by the fact that the area was incorporated into mainland Namibia mainly through the geopolitical machinations of the various imperial powers that colonised the country (Kangumu 2011; Massó Guijarro 2013). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the Zambezi Region has developed a complex relationship, characterised by ethnic tension and political strife, with the rest of the country (Kangumu 2011). Resentment of the state has always been pronounced in this region, as evidenced more recently by the 1999 failed secessionist attempt by the Caprivi Liberation Movement led by Mishake Muyongo and Mafwe Chief Boniface Mamili, who are both now in exile in Denmark (Massó Guijarro 2013).

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In this article, we draw on George Sefa Dei's anti-colonial discursive framework to critique the conventional educational practice that continues to marginalise indigenous knowledge in postcolonial Namibia. According to Dei, the anti-colonial discursive framework (in relation

to Euro-modernity) provides a "radical critique of the dominant, as the colonial oppressor whose antics and oppressive practices continue to script the lives of the subordinate and colonized even [if people] resist such dominance" (Simmons and Dei 2012, 68). Dei is keen to show that the anti-colonial approach not only enables people to understand the persistence of the coloniality of power in Africa's postcolonial education, but importantly, it also explicates how local people can claim indigeneity in education (Dei 2010).

The importance of Dei's anti-colonial discursive framework lies in the fact that it speaks to the *present* realities of marginalised subjects. The approach is also revolutionary in its thinking because it "offers possibilities for the colonised and marginalised subjects to design their own futures" (Simmons and Dei 2012, 68). Dei suggests that while anti-colonial discourse may draw from postcolonial/neo-colonial perspectives, it is inherently critical in its approach not only to the colonial, which is "imposed and dominating" (Dei 1998, 514), but also to the postcolonial/neo-colonial encounter, which is "transhistorical rather than historical" and "persists across time in the colonising of nations and peoples" (Simmons and Dei 2012, 77; 92). Crucially, Dei's anti-colonial approach is about the politics of action and radical resistance to the colonial encounter in Africa's postcolonial education. Such resistance is necessary because the "colonial space has been left intact to continue with the its imperializing gaze, scripting and regularization of the 'other'" (Simmons and Dei 2012, 69), even though African countries are no longer colonised in the historical sense.

With respect to schooling, Dei's anti-colonial discursive framework (encapsulated in what he calls 'anti-colonial education') problematises the "marginalisation of certain voices and ideas in the school system, as well as the delegitimation of the knowledge and experience of subordinate groups in the pedagogic and communicative practices of schools" (Dei 1999, 399). For Dei, anti-colonial education offers the colonised and marginalised the tools to challenge the "manner in which knowledge as articulated through contemporary schooling and education comes to be disseminated within classroom spaces" and how cultural knowledge "can help disrupt Eurocentric narratives embedded within conventional spaces of learning" (Simmons and Dei 2012, 77-78). Dei affirms that anti-colonial education allows indigenous peoples to claim their knowledge in the academy (i.e., education) as part of the anti-colonial struggle for 'true' independence from the "exploitative relations of schooling and knowledge production" (Dei 2010, 103).

For us, the phrase "knowledge is power" or alternatively "he who controls knowledge has power" underscores the power/knowledge dynamics that exist in education between those who create and control knowledge and those who consume that knowledge. In extending this maxim to the Namibian case, we open up a window of opportunity for *real* change in the area of education because political power now rests firmly in the hands of African leaders who should encourage rather than prevent the disruption of "Eurocentric narratives embedded within conventional spaces of learning" (Simmons and Dei 2012, 77-78).

RHETORIC ON EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN NAMIBIA

At the time of independence, Namibia inherited an unequal, elitist and racist educational system (Dahlstrom 1995). Since then, the country has undertaken several reviews of the educational system in an effort to align teaching and learning with the ethos (i.e., equity, quality and democracy) and aspirations of nation building in a new, non-racial African state (Fumanti 2006). An important task undertaken by the new government has involved fast-tracking educational access for the majority of the African population whose education was ignored by colonial regimes - at the time of independence, only 38% of the African population was literate (Leong 1989). As part of this change, structural alterations have been introduced that include compulsory schooling for children 6-16 years of age, free primary

education, increased enrolment in teachers education and new school curricula (Namibian Government 1993).

However, the reality on the ground is that, these efforts notwithstanding, *complete* educational reform has not occurred in Namibia. Instead, educational reforms have merely produced a "compromise" curriculum in the spirit of national reconciliation that was adopted at the start of independence to ensure that reforms address the educational needs and ideological aspirations of *all* Namibians regardless of race or ethnicity (Namibian Government 1993). However, we must not overlook the fact that there has been some government resistance to full-scale educational reform. This is rooted in the fact that, during the first decade of independence, key government departments of education were managed largely by technocrats (mostly Afrikaners) who had served under the previous apartheid regime (Fairweather 2006). It was thus not uncommon for these technocrats to resist or frustrate, albeit implicitly, the implementation of more *Africanised* aspects of new educational policies, that clashed with their own ideological views on race and governance (Fumanti 2006).

The problem lies in the fact that, in Namibia, worldviews are conflicted between two competing ideologies: one that addresses the "universalist ethics of nationalism" and another that addresses "the particularist ethics of ethnicity" (Fosse 1997, 429). This conflict is perhaps more pronounced in the Zambezi Region, where the Mafwe, while subscribing to the ethos of a new independent state (i.e., peace and democracy), are also persistent in their resolve to protect traditional value systems that are threatened by global value systems delivered through formal education (see, Mans 2000). Furthermore, although largely understated, inter-ethnic problems that border on ethnocentrism have remained a sensitive and divisive issue in postcolonial Namibia (Namibian Government 2006). Consequently, implementing a wholesale cultural policy has been challenging in a country where ethnic groups are quick to assert their peculiarities and semi-autonomous existence that at times sharply contrast with the notion of *one* nation that the postcolonial state seeks to promote (Fumanti 2006).

Despite the rhetoric from policymakers that the educational arena has dramatically changed, the reality is that the educational model that has been adopted in postcolonial Namibia (despite cosmetic changes) remains Eurocentric and thus tied to an "international and global culture" (Namibian Government 2010, 7). As Kristensen has astutely observed, educational reforms in Namibia have inspired evolutionary (maintaining the status quo) rather than revolutionary changes, as the curriculum stresses individualism rather than communalism as indicators of success and social mobility (Kristensen nd). Thus, while national policies initiated following independence removed Afrikaans as the main language of instruction in schools, its replacement was English (another foreign language) (Namibian Government 2008), with indigenous languages to be used only in primary school (Grades 1-3) as an *optional* medium of instruction (Namibian Government 1993).

The highly anticipated *National Curriculum for Basic Education* (NCBE), which covers pre-primary through senior-secondary education (formulated in 2008 but implemented in 2010), has merely rubber-stamped issues listed in the 1993 policy, particularly those issues relating to the high status ascribed to the use of English vis-à-vis African indigenous languages as the *lingua franca* in education (Namibian Government 2008). Furthermore, although the NCBE claims that it "embraces indigenous knowledge", it does not specify how this is to be done in schools (Namibian Government 2010, 7). In addition, cultural knowledge is not listed as a core skill of basic competence or as a key learning area in the new curriculum, and cultural knowledge is not included as a possible area of instruction to be integrated across the curriculum (Namibian Government 2010).

We argue that postcolonial education in Namibia should exhibit a visible indigenous or cultural element in what Nekhwevha refers to as the "cultural capital of the African masses" (Nekhwevha 1999, 1) if the envisioned ideals of a *truly* African cultural renaissance are to be realised in the new political and social order. Cultural policy in Namibia must adopt a comprehensive approach to ensure that indigenous knowledge is firmly embedded in the educational system. Currently, the country's arts and culture policy only offers broad directives for government institutions (Namibian Government 2001). Those who have commented on this policy note that it is narrow in focus (Mans 2000) because, in schools, this curriculum is only applied to arts disciplines (drama/dance, music and visual art) as a distinct facet of Arts Education (Namibian Government 2006). Outside of formal education, this policy has engendered a proliferation of cultural groups, many of which perform for tourists in joint commercial ventures with Western-owned tour operators that are keen to sell "dream" African holidays as part of their tourist businesses (Fairweather 2006). The problem here is that these performative displays are sanitised, pre-packaged and syncretised, and they are thus *inauthentic* and embody what scholars refer to as "invented" tradition (Leong 1989).

In the absence of a specific cultural policy for schools, critical aspects of indigenous culture may be lost forever among future generations. Given that only 1% of the African population can now converse effectively in their own indigenous language (World Fact Book 2012), our view is that, if left unchecked, Westernised education will continue to have a corrosive effect on the ability of Namibian learners to acquire indigenous knowledge and skills. Some of its perceived but contested advantages (i.e., the marketability of Western education in a globalised job market (Tikly 2001)) notwithstanding, Eurocentric models of education may *potentially* rob African communities of the *power* to offer future generations a holistic education through which indigenous knowledge is appraised as another way of knowing in the production of the curriculum (Harlech-Jones 1998).

METHODOLOGY

This article arises from qualitative fieldwork research conducted with the Mafwe of the Zambezi Region. The study was undertaken to enrich existing discourse on the beliefs, norms and values held by African indigenous communities in contemporary life and to also contribute to a critical analysis of the need to "indigenise" Namibia's postcolonial curriculum. The study was guided by three research questions. First, what is the nature of Mafwe indigenous knowledge? Second, to what extent has Westernisation affected Mafwe cultural traditions? Finally, how can the Mafwe reclaim their indigenous knowledge in a modern educational context? The researchers made two 2,600-km return journeys from their base in Windhoek to Mafwe settlements in the Zambezi Region. The researchers first visited in 2007, and the second visit was conducted in 2008. For each visit, the researchers spent three days in the Mafwe community to conduct research. This study was conducted by two male researchers who are both Black and African in origin. One of the researchers is a Namibian of the Mafwe ethnic group, and the other researcher is from a Southern African country. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach that included phenomenological fieldwork and a teacher questionnaire. Permission to conduct this research was granted by both the Directorate of Education of the Zambezi Region and the Mafwe Traditional Authority based in Chinchimane Village, which is located 65 km south of Katima Mulilo, the capital of the Zambezi Region.

Phenomenological fieldwork involved face-to-face interviews with five traditional leaders and eight village elders (n=13), with a gender composition of three women and 10 men. Respondents were selected in consultation with the Linyanti Traditional Authority (custodian of Mafwe culture), which provided the researchers with 50 names of individuals who were

considered to possess rich knowledge of Mafwe culture and history. The interviews were conducted using a phenomenological approach because we wished to investigate not only how the Mafwe participants describe the material content of their indigenous knowledge but also how their lifeworld is structured (i.e., their perceptiveness of selfhood, personal experience and criticism of and engagement with social and cultural realities (Moustakas 1994)). As the study investigated culture and its various manifestations, the phenomenological method also allowed us to capture personal and collective lived experiences, which, in this case, concerned how the respondents perceived and interpreted various aspects of traditional Mafwe culture. Each interview lasted no more than one hour, and with the participants' consent, all interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The average age of the interviewed participants was 69 years, meaning, that on average, interviewees were born in the 1930s and 1940s.

The second research method involved the distribution of a self-administered questionnaire with 14 semi-structured questions. The questions were divided into four sections: (a) personal information, (b) history of the Mafwe people, (c) the impact of Westernisation on traditional culture and (d) knowledge of religion, wellbeing, time, food, morality and cosmology. The questionnaire was completed by a purposive sample of Mafwe secondary teachers (n=45) who were targeted because they had undergone both initiation (*kashwi*) (i.e., traditional education) and Western education and were thus able to draw valid comparisons between the two forms of education. The teachers came from four educational inspection catchments: Bukalo, Chinchimani, Katima Mulilo and Sibbinda. The average age of the teachers was 49 years, and five women and 40 men completed the questionnaire.

One major limitation of the study concerns the presence of a gender imbalance between the participants. The preponderance of men included in the study is attributable to the predominant patriarchal belief inherent to Mafwe culture that traditional leadership is a male-dominated institution (Khumalo and Freimund 2014). This may explain why the majority of the names that were provided by the Traditional Authority as "key" informants were men. We also found that few female teachers completed the questionnaire. Difficulties associated with soliciting female research participants from marginalised communities have been described in previous studies. Cannon et al. suggest that female subjects require the adoption of more labour-intensive strategies involving greater personal contact and a longer stay in the community to establish familiarity (Cannon et al. 1988). Because we only briefly visited (a total of six days) the Mafwe community, we were unable to establish personal rapport, especially with potential female participants. Thus, issues analysed in this article only reflect the views of those who participated in this study, most of whom were men.

With the exception of the questionnaire, which was completed in English by the teachers (holding at least a university diploma), all interviews were conducted in *Sifwe* (the Mafwe language), later transcribed by a paid research assistant and then translated by one of the researchers. Data analysis was conducted in two heuristic stages. First, interview transcripts and questionnaire responses were read twice to gain familiarity with the data. Second, emergent issues were identified, and coded into common themes (Ryan and Bernard 2003). To protect the identity of respondents, non-identifiable codes were used in all verbatim excerpts.

KNOWLEDGE, KNOWING AND PEDAGOGY

Postcolonial scholars have called attention to the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge not as a form of knowledge in competition with others but crucially as legitimate knowledge in its own right (Briggs 2005; Dei 2010). As Simpson and others have noted, indigenous knowledge is *legitimate* essentially because it encapsulates people's deep-rootedness to their

culture and cultural identity (see Simpson 2004). Respondents in this study shared this view and explained that cultural elements have imbued the Mafwe with a distinct identity, which the respondents take pride in. From these conversations, a holistic paradigm of Mafwe indigenous knowledge emerged as evidenced by the richness of their language, philosophy/wisdom, religious practices, hunting and farming practices, traditional medicine and healing approaches, tribal history, life rituals (birth, maturity, marriage and death) and chief installation celebrations. Respondents noted that, while some of these issues are learned and developed in formal *kashwi* settings, informal education systems have played a major part in this process, as well (see Matemba 2010). These values and practices are adopted indirectly through participation in traditional events (learning by doing) and through observing and internalising spoken and unspoken assumptions on various aspects of culture. In addition, the respondents learned cultural norms through individual instruction from parents and elderly relatives/villagers, engagement in artwork and through participation in various ceremonies and festivities.

From the respondents' comments, it can be surmised that great value is placed on traditional means of educating children on local culture. A number of the respondents revealed that when they were young, they had attended the highly important but "secretive" *kashwi* sessions. It was clear that the respondents were proud to have personally undergone the traditional education system. We also learned that the Mafwe is a literate community with vibrant means of transmitting cultural knowledge and values to younger generations. Importantly, we also learned that the process of transmitting cultural knowledge is "well developed" and that indigenous knowledge taught/learned is "very useful" to the respondents and the communities in which they live.

In traditional African societies, psychological connectedness between individuals and responses to cosmology (i.e., the physical environment, spiritual reality and human existence) form the basis from which knowledge, as a philosophical entity, has emerged (Mbiti 1999). The Mafwe strongly believe that knowledge derives from either real or perceived experiences. If an individual has not personally encountered a particular experience, it is believed that he/she cannot possess personal knowledge of that experience. The term '*kulobone*' (experience is the best teacher) is used to illustrate this concept. Respondents noted that the Mafwe have used their knowledge to develop an in-depth understanding of the world around them; to devise means of responsible self-management; to develop an unshakeable sense of affiliation with the traditional group; to respect their gods and the power of their tribal leaders; and to make moral decisions and solve moral dilemmas. Interestingly, respondents noted that several traditional Mafwe skills have been passed on to younger generations (Table 1).

TABLE 1

Skills for Handling Wild Foods

	Translation
Kufura machinka	How to pick wild fruits
Kutafuna mungabwa	How to eat wild fruits
Kuhika malyacizo	How to cook wild tubers
Kutwa ngalangala	How to store wild cereals
Kusa magoncela	How to harvest wild tubers
Kukoshaura maonde	How to pick water lilies

From this discussion, it is evident that principles of traditional Mafwe education have been maintained. The interviews also demonstrated that Europeans were wrong to assume that the

Mafwe engage in no "educational" activities (Maurial 1999). The interviews unearthed several indications that, prior to the arrival of Westerners, the Mafwe had already supported an advanced educational system. Traditional activities such as *kanamundame* and *mulabalaba* enhance reasoning, logic, numeracy and mathematical skills. These activities have also improved the counting capacities of Mafwe youth. This skill is particularly useful for the purpose of counting livestock (see Table 2). The counting system applies a holistic approach that situates objects within a greater whole, that is, objects are counted in large numbers within groups. Drawing from personal experience, one respondent noted:

> Before I attended the European school, I had the opportunity to play cultural games like *mulabalaba, kanamundame, kudoda* and others with my peers. These games opened my eyes so that by the time I started school, I could count my father's cattle thanks to the knowledge I obtained through the cultural games (Male school teacher 19, age 59).

The excerpt above illustrates the pride that the respondents have in their culture, and its usefulness in teaching individuals how to count livestock in particular. Respondents added that the ability to know the size of one's herd is important because a man's status is largely equated with the number of animals he possesses, as animals (and cattle in particular) are used in marriage negotiations (*dowry*) and as sacrifices to appease the gods. We must note here that the use of numeracy skills to count livestock contrasts from Mbiti's often over-generalised account of African culture. For example, he asserts that "counting people and livestock is forbidden in many African societies, partly for fear that misfortune would befall those who are numbered" (Mbiti 1999, 56). Mafwe participants did not share this view and confirmed the value of numeracy skills for the reasons noted above. We should also note that while the mode of counting described by the respondents initially (Table 2) appeared similar to numerical sequences of Western forms of counting, this was not due to the influence of Western education per se; rather, it was evidence of the existence of innate numeracy skills that all human societies possess (e.g., processes of explicit counting and subitisation (De Cruz 2004)).

TABLE 2

Mathematical Skills and Concepts of Time

Numeracy		**Lunar Calendar**	
Ngoshile	(One)	*Kuzyangure*	(Harvesting time in April)
Nangala	(Two)	*Kamwiana*	(Moderately warm in August)
Kangala	(Three)	*Ndimbila*	(Very hot in September)
Mbuntamo	(Four)	*Nkumbulisa balimi*	(It will rain – ploughing time in October)
Mbilimbwishwa	(Five)		
Miyosho	(Six)		
Chokange	(Seven)		
Ngolilo	(Eight)		
Mindule	(Nine)		
Kumi	(Ten)		

Respondents stated that the Mafwe also held specific concepts of time, including a lunar calendar of thirteen months. The Mafwe are thus able to perceive seasonal changes as demonstrated through names given to different months of the year (Table 2). Mafwe knowledge is also transmitted through self-discovery and traditional education (*kashwi*). In particular, language is identified as an important factor that conserves Mafwe indigenous knowledge because *Sifwe* is enriched through literary expressions that help keep the culture alive. Respondents reiterated that, to fully understand Mafwe indigenous knowledge, an understanding of the Mafwe language is necessary because the language is the medium

through which Mafwe indigenous knowledge is fully understood and appreciated. As an aspect of the language, Mafwe wisdom has traditionally been expressed through stories, folklore and metaphors. Respondents further explained that, historically, folktales were told to the young, and, at the end of a story, the narrator would ask questions of the audience that required a certain level of wisdom to understand and answer. Stories and idiomatic expressions helped to cultivate eloquence and debating skills in community affairs.

COMPETING WITH AND LOSING TO WESTERN "OTHERS"

According to Dei (2010), indigenous knowledge continues to suffer in the academy largely due to a game of "power and ambition work" whose rules are set and determined by the dominant Western ideological power (Dei 2010, 89). As the excerpts here illustrate, Mafwe participants in this study highlighted their frustration with the historical negative impact of Western political and epistemological power on traditional Mafwe culture. Participants expressed that the community suffered culturally from their interactions with Western "others" (missionaries, settlers and colonial rulers). They noted that, from the arrival of Westerners to the present, traditional Mafwe culture and the means through which it is transmitted have been weakened, condemned and ultimately excluded from Western knowledge systems and modern-day educational institutions. These respondents explained that Westerners had expressed such contempt for African culture in Namibia that, in the case of the Mafwe, their indigenous knowledge was rendered virtually "invisible" in national life. As a consequence, systematic strategies for maintaining and storing rare and sensitive aspects of Mafwe culture have been neglected, and some have unfortunately been lost permanently.

It is likely that, if the Mafwe did not already have a vibrant *oral* culture, little of their traditional knowledge and practices would have survived because Western culture was determined to erase what was considered to be "pagan", static knowledge that was irrelevant to Eurocentric visions of society (see Abernethy 1969). A careful examination of the data reveals the extent to which Western influence has affected traditional Mafwe culture. Table 3 below provides a summary of traditional practices that respondents noted had been either condemned or prohibited by missionaries, settlers and colonialists.

TABLE 3

The Effect of Western Influence on Traditional Practices

Traditional Practice	**Translation**
Zyalyi system	Communal eating system
Chiningamo	Evening gatherings
Entango	Traditional storytelling time
Kashwi	Initiation rituals
Kushakiwa	Courting
Malobolo	Payment of dowry
Njambi	Communal ploughing
Luwanga	Communal meat-eating areas
Mbelesa	Riding expeditions

Furthermore, respondents lamented the onslaught of Westernisation on their culture. One visibly concerned participant explained:

> Cultural activities among the Mafwe have either been lost or are simply neglected because they were discouraged by the German and South African education systems. Even today, courage and bravery testing at cattle posts where young men were posted to guard family livestock from mauling by lions and other wild animals is no longer done. Boys are no longer required to

> attend to cattle posts. Incantations and other rituals relevant to community wellbeing are gone (Male traditional leader 9, age c. 74).

The issues raised in the quotation listed above further illustrate negative repercussions of Western education, which, as we have seen, contributed to a loss of cultural knowledge among Mafwe youth. Respondents lamented that while White people (i.e., Westerners) were quick to condemn Mafwe traditions, they did not established an education system of *relevance* to the cultural needs of Mafwe children and youth. The poignant point was also made that as their culture had been seriously undermined for such a long period of time, self-cultural groups experienced a sense of self-doubt, leading some to neglect the importance of local cultural traditions.

Respondents were equally critical of present-day parents for their failure to support family related cultural practices. Respondents claimed that cultural knowledge continues to be ignored because present-day parents who themselves did not receive a "proper" cultural education and now entrapped by modern life in the cities and have neither the inclination nor the skills to educate their own children on Mafwe cultural practices. They noted that this vicious cycle is what is contributing to a further loss of Mafwe culture and traditional skills. However, respondents were also quick to place equal blame on youth themselves because they have "wholeheartedly" embraced global popular culture, which is largely fuelled by Western media (films and music), and the materialistic lifestyles conveyed through these media are difficult to resist. Consequently, many young people now hold the view that indigenous knowledge is out-dated and irrelevant to current developmental issues affecting the world. Respondents felt that Westernisation and the lure of popular culture have placed traditional culture at a great disadvantage as an alternative means of cultural and community life, a reality that much of the older generation finds extremely difficult to accept. For example, regarding personal relations, one respondent noted:

> There is no traditional education these days. In the past, a young girl would not go to the house of her suitor or of an ordinary boyfriend alone, but today it seems that there are no ethical boundaries on what young people can do.... What kind of parent allows her child do that without the suitor being charged many heads of cattle? We are living in difficult times, *tuli munkole* indeed! The Western system has robbed us of our own dignity and values, and we are failing to teach our children how we want them to live their lives (Female village elder 1, age 72).

Whether justified or not, respondents blamed several vices and problems on processes of Westernisation and took particular issue with the effects of a perverse global popular culture on young people. The respondents commented on poor dress habits, increased divorce rates, increased illegitimate pregnancies, worsened moral behaviour and increased elopements. Clearly, the effects of Westernisation (in its broadest sense) on traditional Mafwe culture and, consequently, on cultural loss among the younger generation were issues of great concern among the study respondents.

RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

In this section, we explore ways through which indigenous knowledge may reclaim its place in the Namibian postcolonial education system. The study respondents provided numerous viewpoints on corrective measures for ensuring that indigenous knowledge can, once again, be included in formal education. The respondents suggested that effective policies be introduced to encourage the dissemination of indigenous knowledge in schools for Mafwe youths and other young Namibians. Furthermore, the respondents were confident that this would also help teach Mafwe youths not to discriminate against others on the basis of race or tribal affiliation. It

was also argued that this would expose young people to moral behaviours such as adhering to a respectful dress code and avoiding vices and other immoral activities that harm present-day youths.

Given the country's previous political history, and especially under South African apartheid, during which discrimination against Black Africans was endemic, respondents felt that the indigenous moral code of *Ubuthu* (an African moral philosophy that stresses the importance of community (see Van Norren 2014)) would help heal past wounds. They argued that this was necessary because, as a result of the perversity of the apartheid system in play before independence, young African Black policemen had grown accustomed to beating elderly Black men and women - a taboo in Mafwe culture. Respondents also indicated that the Mafwe and other Namibians must *purge* themselves of colonial attitudes towards traditional culture. The respondents indicated that white supremacist beliefs and Western attitudes and structures that suppress the viability of African indigenous culture must be dismantled. When asked whether Western structures are completely harmful to education, respondents were quick to clarify that decolonisation does not denote ignorance of foreign traditions. Rather, it was stressed that Namibians must overthrow *alien* authority (i.e., Western influence), which has exercised control over African community life and traditional culture for far too long.

Furthermore, respondents argued that Namibia must introduce cultural education as a compulsory subject for all public school students and that, more importantly, indigenous knowledge is used as the key factor that determines how curricula are developed (content) and delivered (pedagogy). Several advantages of African-orientated curricula were noted. Respondents argued that, if taught as part of cultural education, traditional dances can have a curative effect. For example, besides providing entertainment in African communities, respondents claimed (though unsubstantiated) that Mafwe dances such as *pela*, *chiyaya*, *chisongo* and *chingubu* can lower high blood pressure and combat stress. They also observed that the time was ripe for education in Namibia to include the teachings of traditional religions, which have long been condemned as heathen and excluded in deference to Christian religious education (Hartman 2011). They suggest that this inclusion would inculcate in children a greater awareness and respect for traditional religion as the driving force that has historically united tribal communities (Mbiti 1999). They wished to see the day when, in schools, children would be given the opportunity to identify the trees and other plants that the Mafwe have traditionally used for medicine and to use this knowledge. Respondents noted that an indigenous-based curriculum would help the Mafwe community and other ethnic groups in Namibia to recapture and document traditional knowledge, which in their view is at risk of being lost forever.

DISCUSSION

Dei (2010) argues that the power of Western knowledge is based on "epistemological racism" built on the supposed superiority of its knowledge as "enlightened discourse". He suggests the need for African scholars, practitioners and governments to adopt an anti-colonial stance of resistance to Western curricular power through "self-actualisation and collective empowerment" (Dei 2010, 101). In examining the findings reported in this article more critically, knowledge (how it is produced, used and maintained) is found to be an issue related to the politics of power/knowledge and the implications of this dynamic for postcolonial education (see Agrawal 1995). Given Namibia's fractured history, throughout which African indigenous knowledge has been condemned and marginalised, we argue that this situation has afforded Westerners with not only *political* but also *ideological* power.

Thus, for over a century, African children were denied the opportunity to receive an education that was relevant to and consistent with their cultural heritage (see Elabor-Idemudia

2011). Unfortunately, even after independence and despite marginal attempts at educational reform, the curriculum provided in Namibia has essentially remained Eurocentric. This suggests that ideological power has not yet completely been transferred to indigenous Africans in Namibia, echoing a dynamic similar to that which Altbach (1977) describes as "servitude of the mind". Altbach convincingly argues that, in post-independent Africa, education serves neo-colonial interests of the political elite who, rather than transforming education, have merely adjusted it to suit their needs as a weapon of power and social control in accord with a Eurocentric framework (Altbach 1977).

In some ways, new African leaders have become "ambassadors" of colonisers in their failure to break with the past by advocating for evolutionary rather than revolutionary education policies (see Kristensen nd). In Namibia, as in numerous other African counties, neo-colonialism has survived because the political and social structure has not been modified by new leaders. In Namibia, proficiency in African languages, especially among young people, is declining due to the absence of policies that promote indigenous language instruction. The use of English as the *lingua franca* in education and commerce has also generated consternation among people who cannot speak English, thus creating alienation between the political elite and the masses (Sasman 2012).

In line with the dictum *knowledge is power* (Agrawal 1995), we suggest that Namibia, as well as other African countries, urgently needs a return to the source of a 'truly' African-education in which traditional culture is given a central place in knowledge production and dissemination (pedagogy) (Dei 2012). Here, we are quick to note that, by reclaiming indigenous knowledge, we are not suggesting a return to a mystic past or the adoption of "new" imperialist knowledge. We instead accept Wame's statement that "cultural reclamation cannot be attained in totality" because, in reality, "there is no pure, often romanticised past to return to" (Wame 2013, 94). Rather, as Dei explains, we instead seek "a recognition of the need to renegotiate knowledge and develop multiple ways of knowing to allow us to be able to read, know, understand, and interpret our complex world" (Dei 2011, 23).

We also argue that a *return* to indigenous knowledge in formal education will serve as a form of "epistemic resistance" (Wame 2013, 94) against the dominance of Western ideological power that is still prevalent in postcolonial education. This is an important issue to emphasise because the current format of education in Namibia has failed to address the specific needs of the African masses. This point is also highlighted by independent commentators in relation to new basic Namibian national curriculum (i.e., NCBE) that was implemented in 2010 (Hango 2012). It is unsurprising that, even before the NCBE has "cooled" its heels, it is already being criticised as unfit for the needs of students in contemporary Namibia. For example, the curriculum lacks clarity on language policies, and those calling for the use of indigenous languages as additional languages of instruction have been ignored (see Sasman 2012).

CONCLUSION

Although the next review of the national curriculum in Namibia is slated for 2021, we argue that this review should be conducted sooner. When the curriculum is reviewed for reform, we suggest that indigenous knowledge be featured prominently in the curriculum. However, in developing a future national curriculum, two questions must be seriously considered. First, how should indigenous communities in Namibia transform their traditional structures to enable them to adopt effective means of reigniting and maintaining indigenous knowledge in ways that are accessible not only to themselves but also to society at large? Second, how should a future curriculum in Namibia create spaces that not only incorporate indigenous knowledge, but which also guarantee that such knowledge will be widely accepted within an inclusive, multi-ethnic school environment?

In the context of future educational reform in Namibia, policymakers must acknowledge the Eurocentric education's perverse treatment of indigenous knowledge insofar as the national curriculum has traditionally been framed and schools have perhaps unwittingly participated in the formal systematisation of Western ideals in education at the expense of traditional African culture (see Mosweunyane 2013). Another point worth noting is that SWAPO's (the ruling party in government since independence) emphasis on rationality and science as the basis for the country's education has further marginalised indigenous knowledge in postcolonial schooling (see Dahlstrom 2002) despite its rhetoric on the role of culture in social-cultural life.

Examining educational reforms in Namibia since independence demonstrates the need for *revolutionary* changes in the curriculum that are urgently needed if indigenous knowledge is ever to occupy a central place in education. Our argument is that Namibia needs a culturally responsive education that not only speaks to "African realities and conditionalities" (Dei 1998, 509) but also produces learners who are well grounded in their cultural heritage and traditions. As the Mafwe participants in this study suggested, such education would be characterised by the following: mother tongue-based multilingual curricula that include language immersion classes in schools; the identification of cultural knowledge as a core skill of basic competence; a positive image of traditional culture and cultural knowledge in education; and material content of the national curriculum embedded in traditional culture. The challenge, however, is whether educators, policymakers and educational technocrats in Namibia are willing take a bold step to nurture cultural knowledge (in its contested version) by making far reaching changes to the national curriculum.

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